

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

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Frontline Supervisor



This information is provided by Continuum EAP. If you would like more information on these or other topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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EAP Consulting Death In the Workplace

Serious illness and death can shock us in the workplace. It affects employee productivity and alters workplace dynamics. Employees, dealing with their own anxieties about death and dying, wonder how to respond. This can also be a very difficult time for a supervisor or manager. You want to do the “right thing” but at the same time aren't sure of exactly what that is. Remember to consider Continuum EAP if you are faced with an employee death or diagnosis of a terminal illness. We can consult with you, examine options for an EAP response, and help determine what services might be beneficial.



For more information on any of these features, or for help navigating the Continuum website, contact us at (402) 476-0186 or (800) 755-7636 or by email at EASpecialist@4continuum.com.

■ **We have a respect problem. It's my job to try to correct it, but how do I model respect? I know disrespect when I see it, but I don't know how to be strategic about this problem. Will employees even care?**

Nearly all employees take behavioral cues from supervisors. How you act will set the stage for how employees in general will treat each other. You are an authority figure, and all employees learn early on to model the behavior of those who are in charge or are perceived as authority figures. To be strategic, consider the respectful behaviors you think need to be demonstrated. Demonstrations of respectful behavior in some areas will influence respectful behavior in other areas, so you don't have to consider every possible behavior. Start with these, and notice the impact over the ensuing weeks: Greet employees every day and be sincere when you do so. Express genuine concern for their interests and well-being. Give them a few moments to talk about their needs and what excites them. Really listen and make eye contact when you are spoken to. Compliment publicly when you see the opportunity so employees witness your positive behavior toward even the least senior of your staff. In particular, remark on the individual strengths specific employees demonstrate on the job.

■ **I know that domestic violence happens and that signs and symptoms can show up at work. How should supervisors respond, and should we take our cues for how to respond from the employee's assurances that "everything is alright," "not that bad," or "it's all over now"?**

Domestic abuse is a very serious problem that is not fully understood by coworkers or supervisors. It can quickly spill into the workplace and jeopardize employees' lives. There is no way for a manager to judge the degree of seriousness associated with domestic violence once it is discovered. Do not judge such incidents as "not that bad" or "over and done with" based upon the employee-victim's report. Victims typically minimize their plight to prevent management attention and coworker involvement. Supervisors may readily accept a victim's assurances that there is "nothing to worry about." When domestic violence is suspected, contact the EAP to discuss possible steps you should take, how to approach the employee, and what type of referral to consider. A formal referral based upon the impact of the discovery on the work environment is appropriate. A serious misstep is thinking that a supervisor referral will make things worse, is a punitive step that blames the employee, or is no longer needed because things "have blown over."

■ **Many employees who experience harassment, discrimination, bullying, or disrespect don't report it. However, it is important for supervisors to know if it's happening. How do we find out so we can play a role in preventing workplace violence? We aren't mind readers.**

Beyond assigning tasks and evaluating performance, supervisors must get to know their employees individually. This does not mean prying into their personal lives but rather getting to know them one-on-one so trust develops and they are willing to come to you with their complaints. Few supervisors understand this point: It is arguably a safety issue not to get to know employees one-on-one. Only a nurtured and maintained sense of trust between you and your employee will facilitate an employee coming to you with issues of personal and work-related importance requiring your intervention. Not all problems that employees have on the job are technical. Some are personal, but are work-relevant. These may include conflicts with coworkers, feelings of inadequacy concerning tasks, fear of making mistakes, and worries about anticipated technical problems that may arise in the future. These combined personal and work-related concerns will only be shared with supervisors who are trusted, and the burden of creating this trust is on you.

■ **When employees mention personal problems, for instance problems with a teenager, why is it not appropriate to give the employee a helpful book or instructional pamphlet on the subject, especially if the pamphlet is written by an authority?**

Any employee assistance professional will tell you from experience that there is always more to the employee's story than the supervisor knows. For example, you may learn about the problems with a teenager, but be completely unaware of its root cause. Your employee may also be unaware of the cause. Difficulties with a teenager could be caused by dozens of possible problems in a family, the symptoms of which are the teenager's troubles. If you provide information about parenting a teenager to your employee, it could add to the delay in getting proper help.